**Minutes of the DAERAstats User Group meeting**

**Tuesday 24th October 2017**

**2nd Floor Conference Room, Dundonald House**

**Present**

AA Alison Afrifa DAERA / NISRA

KBJ Katherine Booth Jones British Trust for Ornithology

AC Aidan Campbell Rural Community Network

PC Paul Caskie DAERA Director CPESD

ID Ian Duff Ulster Arable Society

MF Mark Forsythe Danske Bank

PH Philip Hamilton DAERA / NISRA

SH Stephen Harvey (minutes) DAERA Statistics & Analytical Services Branch

VH Victoria Hill DAERA Economics & Evaluation Branch

RI Robin Irvine NI Grain Trade Association

CJ Claire Jack Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute

PK Paul Keatley DAERA Statistics & Analytical Services Branch

CM Cathy Malone DAERA Sustainable Rural Communities Branch

JM James McCluggage Ulster Farmers’ Union

CMC Conor McCormack DAERA / NISRA

PMC Pamela McCorry DAERA / NISRA

CMK Cormac McKervey Ulster Bank

SMM Seamus McMenamin Livestock & Meat Commission NI

TMN Timothy McNiece Danske Bank

TM Tom Morrow Irish Farmers Journal

JOB James O’Boyle DAERA College Services Branch

TP Tracy Power (Chair) NISRA Director of Analysis

DR David Rankin Agricultural Consultants Association NI

WT William Taylor DAERA Economics & Evaluation Branch

KT Kathryn Tims Waste & Resources Action Programme NI

**Apologies**

Edward Adamson National Sheep Association

Michael Bell NI Food & Drink Association

Conall Donnelly NI Meat Exporters Association

Jennifer Fulton Ulster Wildlife

Ian Garner Waste & Resources Action Programme NI

Nichola Hughes Sustainable NI

Shaun Irvine Livestock Auctioneers Association NI

Stephen Jess Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute

Mike Johnston Dairy UK

Robert McCullough Danske Bank

Seamus McErlean DAERA Economics & Evaluation Branch

Dianne Ruddock National Trust

Nigel Quinn DAERA Sustainable Rural Communities Branch

**Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the 2017 DAERAstats User Group meeting and encouraged them to contribute to the discussions. The Chair emphasised the significance of consultation processes and how obtaining the views of stakeholders was important for departments.

PC apologised for the length of time since the last User Group meeting, during which DARD statistics and DOE environment statistics were integrated into the new DAERA structure. He anticipated that meetings would be held annually going forward.

**Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising**

Minutes of the last meeting agreed: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/dardstats-user-group-minutes-2015.pdf>

Action points from the last meeting (April 2015):

1. CMC to create NINIS link on Census publication online page.

*Completed* - <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/agricultural-census-northern-ireland>

1. Action: PC to contact Horticultural Forum via DARD Secretariat.

*The DAERA Secretariat advised that an open offer exists to discuss increased provision with the Horticultural Forum whenever convenient to the group.*

1. Action – DARD to consider an historical tweet series.

*The branch unfortunately does not currently have sufficient resource to actively research historical data for a series. The creation of the new department, DAERA, has also widened the area of topics on which the portal needs and wishes to cover.*

*If during the course of normal business practice or when for example answering an AQ or request for data there was historical data uncovered or used, then this was also integrated into the tweet schedule going forward.*

1. Action – CMC to publish 2015 DARDstats presentations online and circulate link to all.

*Completed*

**Agenda Items 3 & 4 – DAERA Statistics 2016/17 & the Forward Work Programme 2017**

AA and CMC gave a review of DAERA statistical activities for 2016/17 and a presentation on the Forward Work Programme (FWP) 2017: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/DAERAStats%20Presentation%201%202016-17.pdf>

TP reiterated that it was important for departments to consult with stakeholders and customers to hear their views and meet their needs, but departments have to justify why any surveys are undertaken.

TM queried the omission of the Milk Quality statistics from the list of Ancillary Industry Services. WT clarified that this publication was an Official Statistics output rather than a National Statistics accredited output and as such was not on the list, even though it was produced by Economics & Evaluation Branch.

JO’B asked if paper format surveys were still more common than online returns. PK said that information is still gathered mostly in hardcopy format, but online returns were increasing. WT said that within Economics & Evaluation Branch, the majority of their information is gathered through emails to processors.

DR asked if there had been an increase from 2016 to 2017 in the number of farmers completing their census online. PK said that an e-mail had been sent to all DAERA Online Services users encouraging them to complete their census return online. PK said that over 15% of census returns in 2017 were completed online, but that he would confirm that figure and the increase from 2016.

*ACTION: Confirmed figures: 17% of census returns in 2017 were completed online (up from 11% in 2016).*

DR was aware of some criticism in the farming community about DAERA focusing on breaking down land farmed into land owned and land taken. PC said that this is of interest from a policy perspective in regards to structural adjustment and the land mobility issue. CMK said that many conacre arrangements have been in place for anything up to 20 years or more, and asked if there might be a need to gather information around long term leases and land mobility.

PC said that consideration would be given to that request and may be addressed in conjunction with recommendations from the Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy (SALMS).

*ACTION: PK to keep under review in line with outworkings from SALMS.*

DR asked if DAERA monitors the reaction and feedback regarding online census returns. AA confirmed that they do and that comments so far have been positive, especially around the ease of use of the system. DR mentioned that when census forms are printed, they do not contain any identifiers such as names or business IDs. This is a problem for agents who may be printing census forms for multiple clients.

*ACTION: AA to contact DAERA ISB to add identifiers to the online census summary page.*

RI said that some businesses were unsure where to record their ingredients on the Animal Feed Survey. He had previously discussed with WT the possibility of having separate boxes to record soya hulls and palm kernels.

*ACTION: WT to include extra boxes on the 2018 Animal Feed Survey.*

RI commented that statistics on compound feed exported out of Northern Ireland are published, but comparable statistics on trade flows into Northern Ireland are not available.

AC wanted to register his appreciation of the rural statistics which are now available on the DAERA website, with particular thanks to Patricia McDowell (who leads on this work area).

ID mentioned the pesticide usage areas and volumes survey. PC said that this was a rolling programme undertaken by AFBI. ID said that no information was currently available regarding horticulture and field crops. CMC explained that this was readily available in the census results that are published on the DAERA website. ID further clarified that he was interested in the areas grown of individual vegetable crops. PC explained that due to the numbers of different vegetables grown and the small sample size, these statistics are not published as the producers of certain crops would be easily identified. TP agreed that producing horticulture and vegetable crops data would be something to look into. PC agreed that it would be beneficial to discuss agricultural statistics with the Horticultural Forum.

*ACTION: PK to follow up with the Horticultural Forum’s DAERA Secretariat.*

There was a brief discussion on farm balance sheet data, specifically HP type finance. PK confirmed this detail was not currently available from the Farm Business Survey. PC indicated that some information had become available through an ad hoc survey on farmer access to finance that had been conducted as part of an assessment of the future potential of introducing Financial Instruments (for example, loan funds or loan guarantees). TM asked when the financial instruments results would be available. PC said that we are currently analysing the survey results and when this is completed, consideration would be given to making them available, although the main purpose of the survey was to inform future policy development. TM asked if this would be an accurate figure. PK said that the results are based on the 350 farms that responded to the online survey. In terms of best information currently available, PK directed TM to the Farm Incomes in NI 2015/16 publication on the DAERA website, which includes information on lending: (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/16.17.285%20Farm%20Incomes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202015-16%20final.PDF>).

CMK asked if it would be possible to separate out figures for asset finance (hire purchase etc.).

*ACTION: PK to check the feasibility of separating the figures for asset finance.*

**Agenda item 5 – Consultation on Environmental Statistics Report**

PMC gave a presentation on the Consultation on Environmental Statistics Report: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/DAERAStats%20Presentation%202%20-%20Consultation%20on%20Northern%20Ireland%20Environmental%20Statistics%20Report_0.pdf>

JO’B asked if the parking tickets and vehicle statistics had been previously published. PMC confirmed that these has previously been published by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). PMC said that DAERA was open to suggestions in terms of possible future indicators. PK agreed that suggestions raised through consultation with stakeholders would be welcomed by DAERA. PMC said that consultation had opened on 6 October 2017 and any responses would be collated and assessed by DAERA and an updated report would be published in summer 2018.

*ACTION: PMC to advertise the ongoing consultation on the NISRA and DAERA Twitter accounts.*

DR asked what figures were used to detail the numbers of pollution incidents. PMC said that the figures were based on confirmed incidents from NIEA, based on severity. JO’B asked if there was a breakdown of the types of pollution incidents and their causes. PK said that this was available on page 50 of the NI Environmental Statistics Report (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2017_2.PDF>). PC said that DAERA was open to individual requests for further information. TP encouraged all attendees to get involved in the consultation.

CJ asked if food waste was included in the composting figures in the report. PMC confirmed that it was.

**Agenda item 6 - Greenhouse Gas Emissions on Northern Ireland Dairy Farms**

PK gave a presentation on greenhouse gas emissions on Northern Ireland dairy farms: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/DAERAStats%20Presentation%203%20-%20Greenhouse%20Gas%20Emissions%20on%20Northern%20Ireland%20Dairy%20Farms.pdf>

JMC asked if there was an explanation for the slight increase in grams CO2e/kg ECM (excl. sequestration) from 2012 to 2013. PK and PC explained that this could be down to a number of variables such as weather conditions; input costs, output prices impacting on farmer use; or variation in yield loads.

CMK asked if investment in slurry storage was taken account of in the figures. PK confirmed that the carbon calculator did not include slurry storage investment. PC commented that the main change across time is the re-calibration of concentrate feed composition over time, as the materials used by mills changed. CMK asked if there was any completed analysis of slurry application methods. PC explained that data had been collected on spreading method that has not yet been fully analysed or published, but would be in the future. CMK asked that if sequestration is excluded, does this impact the figures in regards to larger herds with higher yields farmed on a smaller area in comparison to smaller herds with lower yields farmed on a larger area. PC said that the soil science around sequestration was not yet robust enough for it to be included.

JO’B noted that farming systems would have an effect on the results. Non-dairy enterprises on a farm are sure to impact the results when compared to a dairy only farm. PK mentioned that, in terms of other cattle, the calculator only includes heifers. PK said that there is a similar exercise ongoing around suckler beef. SMM asked when a report would be published. PC commented that AFBI are still developing the carbon calculator model and if demonstrated to be robust, a report could be forthcoming in 2018.

DR asked if there was a link between carbon footprint and ammonia emissions. ID asked if the model includes ammonia as a greenhouse gas. PK said that ammonia is not part of the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

**AOB**

TM asked about the possible implications of Brexit on DAERA Statistics. PC said that a range of statistics will be required and produced after Brexit and that good statistics will be essential as new policies are formed. The EU Farm Structure and other DAERA outputs for the Eurostat family would likely continue in some form. TP agreed that there will still be local uses for all types of data. As yet, there has been no guidance on UK legislation to replace EU legislation.

TM asked if there were figures available on the average completion time for online census returns.

*ACTION: Confirmed figures: The average completion time for June census online returns was 16 minutes (16% completed in 5 mins or less; 38% completed in 10 mins or less; 63% completed in 20 mins or less).*

TP concluded by saying that she hoped the attendees found DAERAstats User Group meetings to be a useful exercise and thanked them all for their input and again encouraged them to take part in any current or future consultations.